# The War of the Mountains in Lebanon 1982-1984: Oral History and Collective Memory

Rabah, Makram

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Arbeitspapier / working paper

WORKING papers
No. 7, 2013

# The War of the Mountains in Lebanon 1982–1984: Oral History and Collective Memory

**Makram Rabah, ZMO/UMAM D&R Beirut**

**Abstract**

This paper explores the violent conflict between Lebanese Maronite and Druze communities that took place in the years 1982-1984. Commonly referred to as *Harb al-Jabal*, or the War of the Mountains, this conflict occurred during the fifteen-year civil war in Lebanon (1975-1990). My paper addresses how both the Maronites and Druze employed forms of group memory to define the historical trajectories of their respective identities and the conflict between them. As part of ZMO's and UMAM's larger research project *Transforming Memories: Cultural Production and Personal/Public Memory in Lebanon and Morocco*[1], my study goes beyond a conventional historiography to explore how collective memory and forms of remembrance played a significant role in constituting community allegiance and inter-community conflict. While this paper consults established archival sources, I also use oral history to analyze the communities' perceptions of themselves and each other. This study is informed by the assumption that postwar reconciliation in Lebanon would be considerable enhanced by researching the relationship between »collective memory« and violence.

**1** This project publication was generously supported with funds from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.

**Introduction**

On 15 February 2009, the Druze chieftain and leader of the Progressive Socialist Party, Walid Joumblatt, was hosting a delegation of American journalists at his ancestral residence in Moukhtara.[2] During a tour of his magnificent palace, Joumblatt was asked by one of his guests about a mural that stands in one of the many reception halls. In response Joumblatt posed before the mural, and explained:

> This is the sight of the French navy landing in 1860 to punish my ancestors for killing the Maronites... However, a century later I took my revenge... [with a small laugh].

**2** I was part of this delegation, which visited Joumblatt one day after the fourth anniversary of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri.

*A mural in one of the reception halls of the Moukhtara Palace, the ancestral residence of the Joumblatts, depicting the French and Ottoman Navy landing on the Lebanese coast to stop the ongoing massacres in 1860. Photo by Husam Harb*



ZMO Zentrum Moderner Orient
Kirchweg 33, D-14129 Berlin
Telefon: 030-80307-0
Fax: 030-80307-210
Internet: www.zmo.de
E-Mail: zmo@zmo.de

Although Joumblatt said this with his usual black humor, and his guests laughed along, it seemed that he meant every word of it, partly because he made an uninterrupted connection between the events of 1860 and 1982, and because he himself possibly believed that to be the case. This is perhaps ample proof that the Lebanese history »attic,« as Lebanon's foremost historian, Kamal Salibi, puts it, has not been properly swept and its elements have not yet seen the sunlight, which is crucially needed for the Lebanese to reconcile with their past and embrace their diversity. In what follows, I want to situate the debate on memory and reconciliation within the events of the War of the Mountains in Lebanon 1982–84 and to introduce a somewhat understudied period of the Lebanese civil war, whose ramifications go beyond the two communities directly involved in the War of the Mountains, the Druze and the Maronites, to include the entire country as well.

The following study is based on my PhD research on the War of the Mountains and the role that collective memory played in forming the two communities' perceptions of themselves and each other.[3] These two communities – the Druze being a heterodox offshoot of Islam, and the Maronites an Eastern rite Catholic group – inhabited Mount Lebanon starting as early as the 11th century, and both claim to be the founders of the Lebanese entity.

These perceptions were an important element in building up to the bloody confrontation commonly referred to as *Harb al-Jabal*. Salibi's landmark work, *A House of Many Mansions*, dissects the formation of the collective memory formation of each of these communities. The Druze-Maronite enmity did not develop overnight, nor was it sectarian in nature or, as some might claim, the consequence of imperialism and modernity.[4] The enmity is a rather complex process dating back at least to the 17th century.

Prior to the establishment of the Republic of Greater Lebanon in 1920, the Druze and the Maronites made up the majority of the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon. Before this period, according to Kamal Salibi, the history of Lebanon »essentially involves a Maronite-Druze story in which other Lebanese communities played only marginal roles, if any.«[5] The fact that the Druze and the Maronites both perceived themselves to be the proprietors of Lebanon made them enter into a historic feud, with each side trying to prove that Lebanon is exclusively their own creation, thus subordinating the other side. This conflict, therefore, is perhaps better understood, as Salibi frames it, as being »a conflict between two tribes flying distinct historical flags with no common vision of their past.«[6]

These two distinct historical banners can be briefly summarized in two broad perceptions. The Druze perceived themselves as a proud warrior clan brought to this land to fend off the attacks of the Byzantines and their associates, known as the Mardaites or the Jarajimah, and later of the crusaders. More importantly, the Druze have formed their image of their Mount Lebanon neighbors, the Maronites, in a way that depicts the latter group as insignificant peasants brought in to carry out chores unbefitting of warriors. On the other hand, the Maronites believed that they were native to this land, tracing their ancestry back to early Semitic peoples. The Maronites claimed that their nation was a melting pot of different civilizations (Arameans, Akkadians, and Canaanites) that inhabited the Lebanese coast and mountain and transformed it into a refuge from the oppressive Muslim invaders. After the defeat of their armies, out of necessity the Maronites forged an alliance with the Druze, who in turn wanted to maintain a certain autonomy from the Sunni orthodox caliphate, whose capital was first in Baghdad then in Istanbul. According to Walid Phares, this historical settlement was mutually beneficial. On the one hand, the Druze needed the labor provided by the Maronites to maintain their agrarian economy; on the other, the Maronites endured until the time was right to reclaim their rights.[7]

Before moving on, however, it is important to discuss the somewhat controversial theme of collective memory, which many scholars have viewed as illusory or perhaps even trope-like. Therefore, it is pertinent to trace the evolution of this concept and how it figures within my current project: how a sense of collectiveness shaped or augmented the conflict between the two communities in the event of *Harb al-Jabal*. I also want to discuss and outline my methodology and sources – most importantly oral history – in order to situate my study within memory studies on the Lebanese civil war.

## Collective Memory: a theoretical framework

The concept »collective memory« first appeared in the writings of Hugo von Hofmannsthal in 1902. However, it was not until Maurice Halbwachs published his book *The Social Frameworks of Memory* in 1925, followed by his main work entitled *On Collective Memory,* that this concept became well-established in the realm of social science.[8]

**3** This paper was delivered at the conference *The Legacy of Kamal Salibi* and was sponsored by the Fares Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies, Tufts University, 20 April, 2012.
**4** Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
**5** Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1988). 231.
**6** Ibid., 18.
**7** Walid Phares, »The Historical Background of the War of the Mountains«, *Al-Masira*, 4 September 1984, 51.
**8** Kerwin Lee Klein, »On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse«, *Representations*, No. 69, Special Issue: Grounds for Remembering (Winter, 2000): 127.

Halbwachs, an apprentice of Durkheim, stated that memories are both public and shareable and that memory is a product of remembering within a group rather than a subjective endeavor. By shifting the unit of analysis from the individual to both the individual and his or her social group, Halbwachs went against the Freudian model that was popular at the time. According to the Halbwachsian model, memory is transmitted – or rather constructed – by individuals as members of groups, and therefore: »there are as many collective memories in a society as there were social groups.«[9] Hence, the process of remembering and forgetting is regulated by the interests, goals, and practices of the group, and essentially what memories one retains of the past are filtered through the medium of the group. Therefore, the fluidity of memory makes the past exclusively dependent on the present contexts; and in effect, trying to determine what really happened in the past is futile.

Despite Halbwachs' novel ideas, sociologists and researchers did not adopt his work until years later.[10] While some researchers adopted the Halbwachsian interpretation of collective memory, others found his analysis a bit problematic. One of the major criticisms of Halbwachs was that he takes away individual agency from remembrance and makes the group an overpowering entity. Frederic Bartlett – deemed the father of modern memory studies – criticizes Halbwachs by claiming that groups do not have memories, but rather individuals in groups do. However, Bartlett agrees with Halbwachs on the importance of the group in harnessing individual memory, affirming that »social organizations give a persistent framework into which all detailed recall must fit, and it very powerfully influences both the manner and the matter of recall.«[11] On the other hand, Barry Schwartz criticized Halbwachs for overstating change in the memory process, which ultimately makes the past somewhat vaguer than it really was. According to Schwartz, there is a dialectical relation between the past and the present, and memory can be understood through that lens of »continuities in our perception of the past across time and to the way that these perceptions are maintained in the face of social change.«[12] Schwartz nevertheless drew on collective memory in his analysis of the commemoration of American historical figures such as Abraham Lincoln and George Washington and how these individuals have been worked – or more specifically forged – into American National memory.

The most striking criticism of memory studies came from within the realm of historical studies. Starting in the 19th century, historiographical scholarship moved towards anchoring the study of history in a more scientific framework; this trend, commonly referred to as the German school, sought objectivity in historical writing and relied heavily on primary written documentation. Naturally, this excluded any role of memory in the newly founded historical profession. Historians frowned upon unwritten forms, especially memory, which is distorted by a number of factors; hence memory was labeled ahistorical.[13] However, the somewhat recent debate on memory vs. history has taken a different turn. The prominent French historian Pierre Nora (1989) regards memory as the archenemy of history. According to Nora, »memory remains in a permanent evolution and is unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation«; history, on the other hand, »is an intellectual secular production, calls for analysis and criticism… history is suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it.«[14] Peter Novick, another critic of the Halbwachsian discourse, strips collective memory of its historical trait, mainly because:

> To understand something historically is to be aware of its complexity, to have sufficient detachment to see it from multiple perspectives, to accept the ambiguities, including moral ambiguities, of protagonists' motives and behavior. Collective memory simplifies; sees events from a single, committed perspective; is impatient with ambiguities of any kind; reduces events to mythic archetypes.[15]

Novick, who coincidently dismisses the so-called »noble dream« of objectivity in historical research, stresses the following important trait of collective memory as it relates to forging a common identity for the group. According to Novick, »Collective memory is understood to express some eternal or essential truth about the group, usually tragic. A memory, once established, comes to defi-

**9** Halbwachs as quoted in *The Role of Memory in Ethnic Conflict*, ed. Ed Cairns and Micheál Roe (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 11.

**10** Ibid., 12.

**11** Bartlett as quoted in James V. Wertsch, »Collective Memory«, in *Memory in Mind and Culture*, ed. Pascal Boyer and James Wertsch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 118-119.

**12** Schwartz as quoted in Patrick Devine Wright, »A Theoretical Overview of Memory and Conflict«, in *The Role of Memory in Ethnic Conflicts*, ed. Cairns and Roe, 12.

**13** Georg Iggers, »The Role of Professional Historical Scholarship in the Creation and Distortion of Memory«, in *Historical Perspectives on Memory*, ed. Anne Ollila (Helsinki: Hakapaino Oy, 1999), 55.

**14** Nora as quoted in James V. Wertsch »Collective Memory«, in *Memory in Mind and Culture*, 125.

**15** Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999): 3-4.

ne that eternal truth, and, along with it, an eternal identity, for the members of the group.«[16]
It is exactly these eternal/essential truths that make collective memory problematic in the context of the Druze-Maronite encounters, as »the memorializing of tragedies or perhaps victories committed against ones' group might lead to creating hostile feeling.«[17] Moreover, as this paper will demonstrate, when collective memory is left unaddressed within a divided society such as that of Lebanon, it can prevent post-war reconciliation and perhaps ignite dormant hostilities; this was the case in 1860, 1958, and 1975–90. The War of the Mountains, as will be demonstrated, is a striking example of this claim.

While I do make use of the term collective memory throughout this study, rather than terms such as social memory or memory cultures,[18] my approach to the realm of memory does not adopt the strict Halbwachsian model. I rather subscribe to the notion that although memory is framed by the group – in this case, the religious sect or the tribe – individuals are still the vessels in which the act or remembrance occurs, even if these are individuals who identify with a certain group. Amos Funkenstein staunchly places the individual in the middle of this debate, affirming that:

> Consciousness and memory can only be realized by an individual who acts, is aware, and remembers. Just as a nation cannot eat or dance, neither can it speak or remember. Remembering is a mental act, and therefore it is absolutely and completely personal.[19]

While the individual, and not groups, does indeed remember, the meanings of these memories are interpreted or recast by the group to serve a certain purpose. This is precisely the sense of the term collective memory that informs my project.

Another reason for the usage of this term is that the concept of collective memory, or its Arabic translation *al-Zakira al-Jamaʿaiya*, resonates more with the people in my oral history interviews, and coining a different phrase would alienate or disenchant my interviewees.

**Sources and Methodology of Oral History**

The sources this project uses, which range from the more traditional secondary sources to the more untapped sources, primarily but not exclusively oral history and Druze/Maronite party publications, aspire to enhance this symbiosis between individuals and group memory and to reveal aspects of the story/stories that otherwise remain suppressed or simply untold. Alessandro Portelli, the famous historian, elaborates the uniqueness of this approach:

> The first thing that makes oral history different, therefore, is that it tells us less about events as such than about their meaning. This doesn't imply that oral history has no factual interest; interviews often reveal unknown events or unknown aspects of known events, and always cast new light on unexplored sides of the daily life of the non-hegemonic classes.[20]

The use of oral history has been rare in most works dealing with the Lebanese civil war. Most of the recent works dealing with memory studies, such as those by Lucia Volk and Sune Haugbolle, do so from an anthropological approach that relies on ethnography, a cousin of oral history.[21] Furthermore, all the existent works deal to some extent with post-war Lebanon and rarely explore the conflict and the role of memory in the actual war, focusing more on post-war implications. While at this phase in my project the oral history interviews conducted remain somewhat limited, they are sufficient (alongside other available sources) to reconstruct the events of *Harb al-Jabal* and to ask about the extent to which memories were a crucial element in the conflict. Ultimately, this project will explore how collective memory or memories, or their lack in certain cases, can be a hindrance to grass-root reconciliation.[22] While sources pertaining to the Lebanese civil war do exist in various outlets ranging from private collections to institutional libraries, none of these collections focus exclusively on the war, as most are incomplete. However, the UMAM archive,

**16** Novick as quoted in James V. Wertsch »Collective Memory«, in *Memory in Mind and Culture*, 126.
**17** Graig Blatz & Michael Ross, »Historical Memories«, in *Memory in Mind and Culture*, ed. Pascal Boyer and James Wertsch, 230.
**18** Some authors, such as Frentress and Wickham, have opted to use the term social memory rather than collective memory, despite their acknowledgment that at times this usage might apply to Halbwachs' collective memory as such. James Fentress, and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1992).
**19** Amos Funkenstein, »Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness,« *History & Memory* 1, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1989): 6.
**20** Alessandro Portelli, »On the Peculiarities of Oral History,« *History Workshop*, 12 (1981), 99.
**21** Lucia Volk, *Memorials and Martyrs in Modern Lebanon* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); Sune Haugbolle, *War and Memory in Lebanon* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
**22** http://www.zmo.de/forschung/projekte_2008/Makram_Lebanon_e.html. This project will include a wide array of interviews that will cover elite and non-elite as well as gender perspectives.

which this project extensively utilizes, contains a wide array of primary as well as secondary sources, ranging from newspapers, periodicals to political party publications and communiqués, which I draw on throughout this study.

**The »1958 generation«**

The first major confrontation between the Druze and the Maronites in post-independence Lebanon was in 1958, in what was labeled a mini-civil war. In 1952, the Socialist Front led by Kamal Joumblatt was successful in ousting the first president of the republic, Bishara al-Khuri, and replacing him with a member of the front, Camille Chamoun, the second president of the Lebanese Republic. Shortly afterwards, Joumblatt and Chamoun's alliance fell apart and transformed into a bitter animosity. The Druze perceived this as yet another episode of betrayal, as it brought forward memories of Bashir II's betrayal of Bashir Joumblatt in the 19th century. Furthermore, the fact that Chamoun was from the town of Deir al-Qamar, which the Druze sacked in 1860, provided both sects with ample material to use in their collective remembrance.

However, the two main sides to the conflict, namely the Druze and the Maronites, mainly viewed these events as an additional chapter in their collective memory of conflicts. One of the major outcomes of this conflict was the generation of young men and women who saw in the 1958 crisis sufficient proof that coexistence within the current political system was not viable. The majority of the people who constituted the cadres of the different militias in 1975, and more so in 1982, were around the age of ten in 1958 and recall this event as an important juncture in the subsequent war. Subsequently, this »1958 generation« did not endorse *al-Mithaq l-Wataniyy* (the National Pact) that was forged among the founders of the 1943 republic.[23]

The Muslims (the Druze, Sunnis, and Shiʿites) found the pact inequitable because it gave the Maronite minority unrestricted control over the country. On the other hand, the Maronites saw that their Christian homeland was threatened by various factors and therefore no longer sustainable under the provisions of the pact. Coincidently, all the individuals interviewed for this study so far, except one, were born between the years of 1940–1958.

Bashir Gemayel, the leader of the Maronite militia, and Walid Joumblatt, the head of the Druze, were born in 1947 and 1949, respectively. The anti-National Pact sentiment was a central theme in Bashir Gemayel's political rhetoric; he made it clear that »the 1943 formula has been buried and we have placed a tombstone on the grave, and we have stationed a guard [over this grave] so it will not be resurrected.«[24] Walid Joumblatt's sentiments were not very different; he made it abundantly clear that Lebanon was molded to please the Maronites, and that not until true reform was achieved [de-Maronification] would the war in Lebanon truly come to an end.[25]

All the interviewees I have met so far affirmed that the events of what was popularly called »the 1958 revolution« contributed in more than one way to the shaping of their own and their communities' collective memories.[26] In this respect, age is extremely important in the molding of collective memory. Social scientists have concluded that historical events that are either witnessed or related to the right cohort are usually well remembered.[27] Studies conducted by Rubin, Wetzler, and Nebes, conclude that individuals between the ages of 13–25 are the group most likely to retain and pass on memory. Hassan al-Beaini, a former Lebanese army officer and a commander in the PSP militia during *Harb al-Jabal*, vividly recalls his father's exploits during the 1958 Revolution. Beaini specifically remembers how his father had to »walk to the Lebanese-Syrian border to get weapons for the village and how, upon his father's return, he brought him to the village square and made him fire a weapon in the air.«[28] Such watershed experiences were not limited to Beaini or his community, but were also shared by the Maronites elsewhere. Elie Hobeika, the leader of the Lebanese Forces (LF) whose name was directly associated with the Sabra and Shatila massacre in 1982, shares a similar experience, which scarred him as an adolescent. Hobeika, interviewed by Ghassan Charbel, relates how in 1970 at the age of 14 he witnessed pro-Palestinian elements vandalizing his apartment building and assaulting a Lebanese police officer in his neighborhood in the heart of East Beirut. According to Hobeika, this was a watershed moment in his life and that of his classmates, who felt that they were in immediate danger. This made them decide to join

**23** Under the provisions of this pact, the Maronites would not seek foreign intervention, but would accept Lebanon as an »Arab«-affiliated country, rather than a »Western« one, while the Muslims were to abandon their aspirations to unite with Syria. The President of the Republic was always to be Maronite, the Prime Minister always to be Sunni, the Speaker always to be Shiʿa, the deputy speaker of the Parliament always to be Greek Orthodox. All public offices were to be in a ratio of 6:5 in favor of Christians to Muslims. Leonard Binder, *Politics in Lebanon* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 1966): 276.

**24** As quoted by Karim Pakradouni, al-Jazeera documentary *The War of Lebanon* (*Harb Lubnan*), aired 2001.

**25** Al-Anbaʾ, 18 April 1983.

**26** The only interviewee born outside this time scope is Dr George Freiha, Bashir Gemayel's chief-of-staff, January 2012.

**27** These studies were conducted by D. C. Rubin, S. E. Wetzler, and R. D. Nebes (1986). »Autobiographical memory across the adult lifespan«, in *Autobiographical Memory*, ed. D. C. Rubin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 202-221.

**28** Interview with retired General Hassan al-Beaini, Virginia, USA, Feb 2010.

the Phalangist party and other similar factions.[29] These memories, however, were not sufficient on their own; other elements, such as group interest, fuel and direct these memories so as to mobilize and in this case militarize the community.

On the eve of the Lebanese civil war these men and women had been subjected to a wide range of indoctrinations by various institutions, ranging from their parties and schools to their families and most importantly their sect. It was against this background that the events of *Harb al-Jabal* transpired. While it is beyond the scope of the current paper to explore these institutions and methods, the overall project will address them at length.

### *Harb al-Jabal*: 1982–1983

Prior to the Israeli invasion, the southern parts of Mount Lebanon (Chouf and Aley) had to some extent remained outside the scope of the civil war. However, on 16 March 1977, Kamal Joumblatt was assassinated by unknown assailants a few miles from his ancestral home in the Chouf. Joumblatt's murder unleashed a series of Druze reprisals against innocent Christians, some of whom, ironically, were card-carrying members of Joumblatt's party. In fact, a large majority of the Christians in the Chouf were followers of the Joumblatt family, while the remaining minority supported Camille Chamoun, the former President of the Republic. As prominent feudal lords of parts of Mount Lebanon, the Joumblatts extended their patronage to all of the inhabitants of the Chouf – the Druze, the Maronites, and the Sunni – and thus transcended these sects. However, the aggressors did not take political affiliation into account and preferred to see the conflict as sectarian and tribal. The Druzes who committed these atrocities were basically fueled by two considerations. Despite the alleged Syrian involvement in Joumblatt's murder, it was the Maronites who solicited Syrian military intervention in 1976; therefore, Maronites were regarded as guilty by association. Second, in 1975, the Christians committed a number of massacres against the Palestinians in refugee camps in *Tel al-Zaʿtar* and *Karantina*, in addition to the Black Saturday massacre in which Christian militias executed civilians based on their ID cards.[30] The Druze massacres prompted a wave of Christian migration from Mount Lebanon to the eastern parts of the country, which were by then a purely Christian region. To many of these refugees, the Israeli invasion brought them one step closer to returning to their villages and homes, which they had left five years earlier. Joseph Abu-Khalil, the Editor-in-Chief of *al-ʿAmal* newspaper (the mouthpiece of the Maronite Kataʾeb party), echoed the frustration and the hatred of the displaced Christians towards the Joumblatti faction. Abu-Khalil, a native of Beit al-Din – the village of Bashir II – violently criticized the Joumblatti attempt to establish a Druze Canton, which started with »Kamal Joumblatt's 1958 coup and continues, till this date, with his son Walid«.[31]

On 18 June, twelve days after the start of the Israeli invasion, a LF convoy made its way to the Chouf Mountains, effectively starting the chain reaction that was to become *Harb al-Jabal*. Before dispatching his soldiers to the mountain, their leader Bashir al-Gemayel stood on the hood of a jeep and gave his men instructions for the mission ahead. George Radi, an LF soldier and a native of Dar al-Haref in the Maten region, was present that day at the barracks of Ain al-Remanh in the southern suburbs of Beirut. He was listening carefully to the words of the *Kaʾed* (Leader). Gemayel, addressing a select group of LF Military Police and Special Forces units, reminded them of the following.

> May God forgive them [his opponents] for what they did; nevertheless we will turn over a new page. We are confident that Lebanon's 6000 years of history will never disappear and that we will rebuild a stronger and a more beautiful Lebanon. Today, a new Lebanon is born and it will not resemble in any way the old Lebanon of 1943, which was based on indifference and dubiousness... we need to forget the old institutions, as we will not allow for a weak judiciary or a parliament full of brokers and wheelers and dealers... Tomorrow you will return to your villages to find statues commemorating the martyrs of the Communist Party and the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party [your opponents]. You will also find your houses burnt and demolished. I tell you from now on, your duty is to protect our foes regardless of what they have done to us in the past... There are some people we fought for the past eight years all across Lebanon, these people have blown up our houses and desecrated the tombs of our ancestors. But today we have to respect their dead; they might have bombed our houses but we will protect theirs. They have insulted our rituals but we will respect theirs, they have expelled us from our homes but we will keep them in theirs. Now is the time to take back the initiative and to reclaim our rightful place in the *Mashriq* (Levant)...[32]

**29** Elie Hobeika as interviewed by the journalist Ghassān Charbal, *Ayna kunta fī al-ḥarb?: iʿtirāfāt jinirālāt al-ṣirāʿāt al-Lubnānīyah, Īlī Ḥubayq*ah, Samīr Jaʿja', Walīd Junblāṭ, Mīshāl ʿAwn. Beirut: Riyāḍ al-Rayyis lil-Kutub wa-al-Nashr, 2011.
**30** Ibid.
**31** *Al-ʿAmal*, 17 March 1983.
**32** *Al-Nahar*, 19 June 1982.

Also present on that day was ES, a high-ranking LF intelligence officer. Reflecting on Bashir's speech that day, ES believed that what was being asked of the *Shabab* (troops) was virtually impossible to carry out. Despite Gemayel's conviction that his strong, 25,000-troop militia was a professional and disciplined army, the reality was somewhat different.

The LF contingent dispatched to the Mountain was composed of two kinds of men. The first group of fighters comprised soldiers native to Mount Lebanon who had been displaced from their homes and villages after 1977 and who had grown up with the collective memory of their ancestors being massacred by the Druze. The second breed of fighters was totally alien to the mountain, but they had lost loved ones and comrades and merely wanted revenge. Surprisingly, it was the latter group who aggravated the situation, mainly because they had no understanding or respect to the particularities of the region and thus committed unspeakable acts against the Druze. According to ES, Bashir's speech on that day did not have »double meanings, Bashir literally meant what he said, however, the people listening to him had double feelings.«[33] Not only the populace but also the higher echelons of both the Druze and the Maronite communities were driven by these mixed feelings.

**Bashir vs. Walid**

On 20 June, one day after the LF militia entered the Chouf Mountains, Gemayel and Joumblatt met at the presidential palace in Ba'bda. The President of the Republic at the time, Elias Sarkis, convened a »Salvation Committee«, which included representatives of the major sects, to discuss the question of the Israeli invasion and its repercussions.[34] Prior to this meeting, the two young warlords had never met before but had been exchanging messages through a network of interlocutors, at least since 1980. Before the committee convened, these two had a side meeting that lasted for 45 minutes. According to the classified minutes of this meeting, Gemayel had asked Joumblatt for his support to be elected President. Joumblatt was also asked to help end the military invasion by convincing his allies, the Palestinians, to surrender.[35] In return, Joumblatt was offered the chance to become the second man in the republic, answerable only to the President. According to George Freiha, Bashir's Chief-of-Staff, Joumblatt's cooperation was extremely important for the success of their project. Gemayel in fact wanted to reinstate the pre-1840 Maronites-Druze alliance, whereby the Muslim parts of Lebanon, namely Tripoli, the Muslim South, and Beka' excluding Zahleh, were to be returned to Syria.[36] Down the centuries, the Maronites have always harbored some sort of delusion that the Druze shared their Lebanese national aspiration and therefore a return to the Lebanese Emirate was plausible.[37]

The blunt manner in which Bashir addressed Joumblatt stems from the fact that, one month before the Israeli invasion, Joumblatt had relayed to Bashir's emissary his willingness to avoid any confrontation in Mount Lebanon. However, the first meeting between the two ended with no tangible results. Joumblatt, perhaps, would have considered Gemayel's proposal, which would have empowered the Druze politically and given them a bigger share of the Lebanese state. However, given Joumblatt's political rhetoric in that period, it is presumable that the memory of the 19th century did not fit well into his collective memory and that of the Druzes. Any reference to this era evoked images of Maronite treachery and the persecution of Joumblatt's grandfathers, and more specifically the Bashir Joumblatt incident mentioned earlier. On the other hand, the Maronites were well aware of this reality and made it abundantly clear that they would never trust the Druze. Interestingly, a common Lebanese proverb preaches this line, as it says »Have lunch at a Druze's but only sleep-over at a Christian's«, stressing that the Druze are treacherous by nature. We can safely presume that this proverb was not created nor propagated by the Druze, but was rather the perception of their Maronite counterparts. An article that appeared in *al-'Amal* newspaper entitled »Walid Joumblatt and the Bashir Gemayel Complex« might serve to underscore this point. This one-page feature story speaks of how Walid Joumblatt, ever since his tribal appointment to the Joumblatti clan, had harbored resentments against the Maronites and particularly Bashir Gemayel. According to the article, this is a trait he inherited from his father. But the most important point that the author Walid, the penname of Nabil Khalefh, makes is the following:

> The name »Bashir« has always been problematic to the Joumblatt family because it reminds them of the end of their feudalism and Bashir II. Now the Maronites, under the leadership of Bashir Gemayel, have proved that they can transform into a fighting Spartan community and not only remain businessmen and men of letters.[38]

**33** Interview with ES. He said this verbatim. Beirut, Lebanon, January 2010. This person requested anonymity

**34** The Committee was made up of Prime Minister Shafiq al-Wazzan, Foreign Minister Fu'ad Butrus, Bashir Gemayel, Walid Joumblatt, Nabih Berri (leader of the Shi'ite Amal Movement) and Nasri al-Ma'luf. See *Al-Nahar*, 20 June 1982.

**35** Interview with an LF official who requested anonymity.

**36** Interview with George Freiha. Beirut, Lebanon, January 2010.

**37** Salibi, 205.

**38** *Al-'Amal*, 4 July 1982, »Walid Joumblatt and the Bashir Gemayal Complex: a reading into Joumblatt's political stances


وليد جنبلاط ... وعقدة بشير الجميل

*Al-ʿAmal, 4 July 1982, »Walid Joumblatt and the Bashir Gemayal Complex: a reading into Joumblatt's political stances based on a psycho-sociological historical interpretation.«*

On 27 June, seven days after their meeting, Joumblatt replied to Bashir's proposal. The Druze militia, who so far had refrained from any open military confrontation with the Israeli army, ambushed the LF who were making their way to the Beirut-Damascus highway. During the course of this nine-day battle in the village of al-Qubayʿ, Ernest Gemayel, Bashir's nephew and the commander of the LF contingent, was killed.[39] According to the Druze commander of the battle of al-Qraya, this victory went beyond tactical considerations, which were mainly to prevent the LF from linking up with their forces in the southern parts of Mount Lebanon. It was rather a fight for »existence and dignity.«[40] For this 28-year-old Druze fighter, it was clear that the duty at hand was his family's legacy and that he was just doing what his ancestors did in 1958 and 1860:

> My father, who had fought with the rebels in 1958, died next to me during the battle and so did a number of my cousins... We did not have any clear instructions from the Party (PSP) to engage the Lebanese Forces, but we knew what should be done. I was defending my land and my dignity, just like my father did in 1958 and my great-grandfather before him in 1860.[41]

This uninterrupted association of the circumstances of 1860 and 1958 with those of 1982 within both communities was made possible through the process of collective remembrance, thus making the possibility of a peaceful settlement rather slim, even nonexistent. Such continuities are enhanced by many media, which range from the family household to schools.

Despite this military setback in al-Qubayʿ, Bashir was undeterred. On 21 August 1982, as part of the settlement brokered by US special envoy to Lebanon Philip Habib, the PLO began its evacuation of the besieged capital. Two days later, the Lebanese Parliament convened under the protection of the Israeli army and elected Bashir the seventh President of the Lebanese Republic. Bashir's election, at least to the Maronites, was not just a political conquest; it was rather a reclaiming of a strong Lebanon capable of protecting the Christians of the East. More importantly, Bashir's presidency was the culmination of the resistance that started in the 7th century with the Mardaites, thus fitting perfectly within the framework of the Maronites' collective memory process. Abbot Bulus Naʿaman, head of the permanent congress of the Lebanese monastic orders and considered Bashir's ideological mentor, saw in Gemayel's election the realization of a long-awaited dream that spanned many generations.[42] This dream, however, was short-lived, as the President-elect was assassinated and with him the dream of Lebanon.

Almost a month after Bashir's election, the parliament reconvened under similar circumstances, and elected Amin Gemayel the new President of Lebanon. Amin, the eldest son of Pierre Gemayel, the founder of the Phalangist party, differed greatly from his younger brother Bashir. Amin, a member of the Lebanese Parliament, which his brother Bashir described as an assembly of wheeler-dealers (see Bashir's speech earlier), fully espoused the 1943 formula. According to George Freiha, Amin's Chief-of-Staff, Israel had agreed to support Amin's candidacy, provided that he honored Bashir's commitments by signing a peace treaty between the two countries. However, Amin did not abide by this promise, and this had terrible repercussions on the Maronites, as will be demonstrated later. These factors placed him at odds with the so-called 1958

based on a psycho-sociological historical interpretation.« The article also featured a relatively small picture of Walid Joumblatt with the subtitle »the remnant of old Lebanon« while above it in the center lay a big picture of Bashir Gemayel with the subtitle »the new face of Lebanon«.

**39** *Al-Nahar*, 27 June 1982.

**40** Interview with PSP Military Commander who requested anonymity. Beirut, Lebanon, December 2009.

**41** Ibid.

**42** Antoun Saad, *Man, Country, Freedom: The Memoirs of Bulus Naʿaman* (Beirut: Entire East publications, 2009): 469.

generation, which comprised the majority of his community, including the 25,000-strong LF.

However, the Druze recognized neither the legitimacy of the new president nor the fact that he did not necessarily share his brother's political vision. The PSP media outlets launched an all-out attack against Amin and accused him of trying to establish a monarchy. *Sawt al-Jabal* (Voice of the Mountain), the PSP's radio station, constantly referred to Amin as »the Shah of Baʿbda«, and to the Lebanese Army under his command as »the army of the ruling family.«[43] This perception of Amin Gemayel as a despot and an extension of his brother was integrated into the Druze collective psyche, consequently adding to their resentment of the Maronites. More importantly, an examination of the Druze rhetoric during that period (Fall 1982 to Fall 1983) lucidly exhibits their fear of annihilation at the hands of what they considered the neo-Crusaders. Walid Joumblatt's interview with *Newsweek Magazine* summarizes this fear and, beyond that, so the extent to which the Druze were willing to go to avoid it becoming a reality:

> We are now in a state of war with the Isolationists [Lebanese Forces] who are responsible for the massacres of *Sabra* and *Shatila* and *Tel al-Zaʿtar*, among others. They want to do the same thing to the Druze. However, I will not allow my people to be butchered at the hands of the Phalangist, no matter what the price is.[44]

Joumblatt's hardline position, and also that of »his people«, radicalized after he narrowly escaped an assassination attempt that destroyed his convoy, injured his wife, and killed one of his bodyguards. The sight of their young leader rushed to the hospital, disoriented and bleeding, affirmed for the Druze that their existence was indeed at stake. The fears of both communities were further reinforced by a number of domestic events. After the death of Bashir, the LF started to send reinforcements into the Chouf region and to establish military barracks and LF chapters. On 6 January 1983, the LF dispatched Samir Geagea along with 200 fighters from the North to the Chouf Mountains. Geagea, a former medical student at the American University of Beirut, acquired a reputation for being efficient and ruthless during his command of the LF units in the North of Lebanon. Paul Andari, Geagea's second-in-command, describes the perilous task that was assigned to them as the »Passing of the Crucifix« on their *Via Dolorosa*.[45]

Published in 1983 directly after the end of the battles, Andari's memoirs record the events and military confrontations of *Harb al-Jabal*. More importantly, these memoirs depict the LF fighters' state of mind and perhaps their collective memory formation. Based on an analysis of these memoirs, Andari and Geagea, both from the North of Lebanon, appear to share the same collective memory of the 1860 war, as well as the so-called Maronite myth that defines their community. However, in a January 2010 interview, Andari affirms that the 1860 events were not present in his group's psyche, while in fact an examination of his book proves otherwise.[46] Andari, for example, describes his entry into the town of Deir al-Qamar with »it's *Saray* [palace], which has remained unchanged since the dawn of the 1860 massacre… imprinted on its walls are the shadows of the [Druze] attackers, with their striped robes and black trousers.«[47] The historical background Andari provides for the 1983 war matches what was earlier described as the Maronite historical banner.

Within the span of two days, 4–6 September 1982, both the Druze and the Maronites fought to redeem 123 years of their history. On the one hand, the Druze aspired to repeat their 1860 victory; on the other, the Maronites wanted to avoid their ancestors' debacle. The military victory of the Druze led to the destruction of over 60 villages and to the displacement of the entire Christian population of southern Mount Lebanon. The war also saw some of the most atrocious massacres, which, along with the destruction of the villages and the displacement of the population, were similar to and perhaps as atrocious as the 1860 events.

The official end of the Lebanese civil war in 1990 saw the start of the return of the Christians of Mount Lebanon to their destroyed villages and towns; however, a true reconciliation process in which the two sides openly expose their historical banner and agree on a common dominator remains pending.

**43** The Voice of the Mountain radio-station, one-year anniversary of *Harb al-Jabal*.

**44** As quoted in *al-Anba'*, 6 June 1983. It is interesting that Joumblatt refers to the Druze as »my people« rather than »my sect.«

**45** Paul Andari, Al-Jabal: *Haqīqah lā Tarḥam* (The Mountain: A Ruthless Reality) (unidentified publisher: 1983): 59. Andari draws parallels to the Via Dolorosa Jesus Christ undertook on his way to the crucifix.

**46** Interview with Paul Andari. Adma, Lebanon, January 2010.

**47** Ibid, 11.

## References


*Books and articles*

Andari, Paul. 1983. *Al-Jabal: Haqīqah lā Tarḥam* (The Mountain: A Ruthless Reality). Unidentified publisher, 59.

Cairns, Ed and Micheál Roe (eds.). 2003. *The Role of Memory in Ethnic Conflict*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 11.

Blatz, Graig and Michael Ross. 2009. »Historical Memories«, in Pascal Boyer and James Wertsch (eds.), *Memory in Mind and Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 230.

Iggers, Georg. 1999. »The Role of Professional Historical Scholarship in the Creation and Distortion of Memory«, in Anne Ollila (ed.), *Historical Perspectives on Memory*. Helsinki: Hakapaino Oy, 55.

Klein, Kerwin Lee. 2000. »On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse«. *Representations*, No. 69, Special Issue: Grounds for Remembering, 127.

Makdisi, Ussama. 2000. *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Phares, Walid. 1984. »The Historical Background of the War of the Mountains«, *Al-Masira,* 4 September 1984, 51.

Saad, Antoun. 2009. *Man, Country, Freedom: The Memoirs of Bulus Naʿaman*. Beirut: Entire East Publications, 469.

Salibi, Kamal. 1988. *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered*. London: I.B. Tauris, 231.

Wertsch, James V. 2009. »Collective Memory« in Pascal Boyer and James Wertsch (eds.), *Memory in Mind and Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, ) 118-119.

Wright, Patrick Devine. 2003. »A Theoretical Overview of Memory and Conflict« in Ed Carins and Micheál Roe (eds.), *The Role of Memory in Ethnic Conflicts*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 12.

*Newspapers*

*Al-ʿAmal*
*Al-Anbaʾ*
*Al-Nahar*

Al-Jazeera documentary, *The War of Lebanon* (*Harb Lubnan*), 2001 (aired), DVD released 26 October 2004

*Interviews*

LF official who requested anonymity, Beirut, Lebanon, January 2010

General Hassan al-Beaini (retired), Virginia, USA, February 2010

PSP Military Commander who requested anonymity. Beirut, Lebanon, December 2009

George Freiha. Beirut, Lebanon, January 2010

Paul Andari. Adma, Lebanon, January 2010



**Makram Rabah** *is research fellow in the project »Transforming Memories: Cultural Production and Personal/Public Memory in Lebanon and Morocco«, a cooperation of ZMO and UMAM D&R, Beirut.*



The **ZMO Working Papers** is a series of publications that document and reflect developments and discussions within ZMO research projects. Texts are usually empirically based and regionally focused and may also represent outcomes of research at an early stage. They are published on the ZMO website.

The **Zentrum Moderner Orient** (ZMO) is the only German research institute devoted to an interdisciplinary and comparative study of the Middle East, Africa, South, Southeast and Central Asia from a historical perspective. Current research focuses on the interaction between predominantly Muslim societies and their relations with non-Muslim neighbours. ZMO was founded in 1996 as one of six university-independent, non-profit research centres for research in the humanities.

ISSN 2191-3897



Design: Jörg Rückmann, Berlin